

CONSCIOUSNESS AND BRAHMAN-ATMAN

Hindu religious and philosophical thought revolves around the basic metaphysical thesis that Atman, the individual self, is identical with Brahman, the Universal Self in which all things are sustained. With a few notable exceptions most Western philosophers have found this thesis too far removed from common sense to consider seriously.¹ My purpose in this essay is to clarify and defend five theses about consciousness which, while formulated independently, have their closest collective affinities to the Advaita Vedanta view of consciousness.

Briefly these theses are that consciousness (I) is neither logically nor contingently identical with its contents, (II) does not necessarily have objects, (III) is not a relation between a subject and an object, (IV) is not necessarily owned, and (V) is not necessarily plural. Each of these claims is entailed, directly or indirectly, by Professor Deutsch's authoritative characterization of Atman as well as by the standard Vedantic sources, such as Saṅkara's *Crest Jewel of Wisdom* and the *Mandukya Upanishad*: "Atman . . . is that pure, undifferentiated self-shining consciousness, timeless, spaceless, and unthinkable, that is not-different from Brahman and that underlies and supports the individual person."² A condition of consciousness being "pure," for example, is that it is neither logically nor contingently (factually) identical with its contents.

While noting general similarities with the doctrine of Brahman-Atman, my intent is not to defend the truth of the doctrine in any of its variations. (Thus we shall not be concerned with the extensive technical jargon and distinctions, such as that between the jivatman and paramatman, that a full-scale defense would require.) My theses may be true and the doctrine of Brahman-Atman false, however, if the latter is true in broad outline, then the beliefs expressed in (I)-(V) must also be the case. Put differently, (I)-(V) minimally must be true for many Western philosophers to take seriously the possibility that the doctrine of Brahman-Atman is more rationally defensible than is generally supposed. For this reason my arguments and assumptions derive almost entirely from contemporary analytic and phenomenological perspectives, particularly those of Strawson and Sartre, rather than from Vedantic sources.

Sections (II), (IV), and (V) are addressed to issues of logical possibility, rather than of actual fact. While this approach may not appear profitable, substantial progress is being made if it can be shown that theses widely held to be impossible or to involve absurdities do not harbor such weaknesses. Moreover, I hope to demonstrate that the theses in question are not mere possibilities, but can be rendered as consistent with relevant conceptual and phenomenological considerations as can their denials usually aligned with common sense.

Some preliminary clarification is necessary. To begin, while 'Atman' is usually translated as 'self', it may be rendered as 'consciousness', although the latter is technically translated as 'cit'. For our purposes 'consciousness' is the preferable rendition of 'Atman'. In Western philosophical and religious thought 'self' minimally connotes 'subject', the referent of 'I' to which we ascribe certain mental and/or physical states and properties depending on our ontological commitments. 'Atman', however, does not belong in this logical category; it is not an individual self at all, even though it is sometimes loosely referred to as one's innermost or real self. Moreover, we shall see that the diaphanous, transcendent character of consciousness will provide us with a more fruitful basis of interpretation and will enable us to avoid some thorny problems associated with monistic worldviews.

The sense of consciousness with which I shall begin and subsequently develop is that of awareness *per se*, irrespective of the objects or contents of awareness. This is the sense normally contrasted with unconsciousness or a state of dreamless sleep. Thus I am concerned with the fundamental sense of the term, not with other senses implied by the adjective form such as that involving discovery ('I became conscious of his misdeeds') or inhibition ('He is too self-conscious'). This meaning is fundamental because it is entailed by discovering, acting inhibited, perceiving, etc., whereas being awake and aware entails nothing about what one is conscious of or how he is conscious of it. While I have presented a synonym, this fundamental sense is at bottom simple and indefinable, and we are forced to rely in part upon each person's intuitive understanding of what it means to *be* conscious. This, I think, is at least partially how we should interpret the belief that Atman is "unthinkable", viz., as simple and indefinable.

I

The claim that consciousness is neither logically nor contingently identical with its contents will appear a truism to some, as metaphysical nonsense to others. Either way, however, the thesis should be argued. To do so requires

that we first distinguish between contents and objects of consciousness. We shall interpret 'content' broadly to mean one's present thoughts or occurrent mental states, such as feelings or sensations, not captured by a dispositional analysis. Thus we are including facets of consciousness, e.g., depression, which may color or shade one's entire awareness as well as the traditionally distinct "elements," such as pain. Pain and depression may be part of the total content of my current state of consciousness, but intelligence, which is dispositionally analyzable, cannot.

A pain is a content of consciousness insofar as it is had by some person. It is an object of consciousness to the extent that it is attended to. While my toothache as a content endures for several hours, as an object it may come into and pass out of being many times during those few hours when, for example, I remain engrossed in a novel. It may or may not be an intended content. I may justifiably infer that my toothache persisted for several hours even though I was not consistently aware of it, since I know that toothaches in general may last many hours and that my present sensation, while less intense, is qualitatively similar in every other aspect to the sensation I had in the same place several hours earlier.

Now if consciousness were logically identical with its contents, then the distinction between a person's being conscious *or* unconscious on the one hand and his being conscious *and* enjoying, say his afternoon walk on the other would make no sense. Nor would the distinction between an awareness of a succession of phenomena and a succession of awarenesses be intelligible. In general we could not distinguish between the fact that Jones is in pain and the fact that he is aware of that pain. These distinctions, however, do make sense and in fact are made. Hence, consciousness is not logically (conceptually) identical with its contents.

This conclusion is supported by a second argument. If consciousness were logically identical with its contents, then it would have to be so identical with certain of its objects, viz., those mental contents attended to, since all contents are actual or potential objects. However, consciousness cannot be logically identical with its objects, since to suppose this would be tantamount to collapsing the thesis of intentionality. We could talk about objects but not about consciousness of those objects. Consciousness, therefore, is not logically identical with its contents. Stated differently, consciousness cannot be identical with its contents, since if it *were* its contents, and if consciousness and its objects *were not* identical, then we could not conceive of an intentional content—which surely we can.

This argument would also demonstrate the contingent non-identity of consciousness and its contents if we interpret the thesis of intentionality as ex-

pressing a contingent non-identity of consciousness and its objects. This seems a most reasonable assumption. As Sartre states: "... to be conscious of something is to be confronted with a concrete and full presence which is *not* consciousness."³

An apparent way around this line of argument would be to suppose that consciousness is identical with some content (that not currently intended) and not identical with other content (that currently being intended). However, this leads to absurdities. We cannot consistently suppose that one minute my pain comprises part of the content of my consciousness and the next minute, while it still persists, albeit as intentional object, that it does not.

Finally, if consciousness were contingently identical with its contents then either we should continually gain and lose it on a Humean account of mind or we should be aware of its being "passed on" from one set of total mental contents or states to the next on a Jamesian view. Both alternatives, however are counterintuitive. Consciousness may be said to pass away when, for example, I go to sleep and to be regained when I awaken, but not during my waking hours when it is instead the contents of consciousness which change. A third alternative is found in Bergson's account of conscious *duration*. Consciousness is its changing contents or states, for Bergson, with the important qualification that the contents interpenetrate and shade off into one another such that they cannot be said to stand alone as distinct elements. Now while Bergson vividly describes the organic and evolutionary character of occurrent mental states—the contents of consciousness—he fails to account for the unity of the *awareness* of those states. As Kant, Strawson and others have demonstrated,⁴ my very ability to individuate temporally this pain as coming before that feeling presupposes the numerical identity of a single enduring consciousness. A unity grounded in a qualitative similarity of content is not sufficient, since the similar contents would fall in different worlds of experience. Thus to collapse the distinction between consciousness and its contents, as Hume, James, and Bergson each do in different ways, is to give up the very concept of successive mental states and ultimately of a coherent concept of one's own experience.

Is consciousness, like Atman, timeless? An affirmative answer is suggested if by 'timeless' we mean minimally 'changeless' and reasons can be found for supposing that consciousness is changeless. There are three such reasons. One is provided by the preceding Kantian argument that knowledge of a temporal succession of one's experience presupposes a changeless backdrop of consciousness against which 'before' and 'after' are rendered intelligible. A second is provided by the distinction between consciousness and its contents defended in this section. Any claim to be introspectively aware of

a change in consciousness itself can be shown to be a claim about a change in the contents of consciousness and usually to presuppose a false identification of consciousness and its contents. We shall defend this claim further in sections IV and V. Finally, it may be urged that consciousness changes in the limited sense that it comes into and passes out of being for each of us in the course of a normal day and night. In the following section, however, we shall see that there are no better reasons for supposing this to be true than for assuming that consciousness changelessly persists even through periods of dreamless sleep. There is, then, some provisional evidence for the thesis that consciousness, like Atman, is timeless.

In *Philosophical Studies* G. E. Moore points out that consciousness is diaphanous, is not introspectable, that "blue is one object of sensation and green is another, and that consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either."⁵ While I am in essential agreement with Moore, I think that his way of stating the matter nevertheless has lent itself to the mistaken interpretation of consciousness as an aboriginal stuff attached in the form of a common introspectable property to its contents, the stuff which James attacked in his essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" I should like to dissociate my thesis from this interpretation, as would Moore. When we reflect upon a pain qua pain and an after-image qua after-image, there is of course nothing intrinsic to the content of either to which we may attach the label 'consciousness'. Consciousness enters the picture, so to speak, as *that for which* pains and after-images, together with their intrinsic properties, are objects. To treat consciousness as if it were a common property of its own contents is surely a category mistake.

It may be objected that the notion of a consciousness not identical with its contents is unintelligible. However, the charge of unintelligibility can be overworked for several reasons. First, for any person who correctly draws the distinction between being aware and being unconscious, some measure of intelligibility is entailed. Second, the concept with which we are concerned should not be assimilated to the truly unintelligible notion of a bare particular. For nothing I have said entails that consciousness might be either contentless or propertyless. Somatic impressions and thoughts, for example, may be contents of consciousness though certainly not identical with it. And consciousness (as does Atman) has, among others, the property of non-spatiality; it is not the kind of entity to which we ascribe predicates of location. To argue for the irreducibility of consciousness to its contents does not imply that it is something wholly other than, and only contingently attached to, its contents or its properties. Third, if the critic assumes that intelligibility can be achieved only by appealing to the contents of consciousness, then he is

surely confused. For these contents are potential or actual objects for something other than themselves, i.e., they are objects *for* consciousness. Fourth, if the charge of unintelligibility is to stick, then the earlier arguments supporting the distinction between consciousness and its contents must be shown to be either unintelligible or unsound. Barring this, we may assume a provisional intelligibility.

Of what significance is the preceding thesis for the contention that Atman is "pure" consciousness? The most plausible interpretation involves rejecting the assumption that only a consciousness from which *all* content had been subtracted might qualify as pure. On this interpretation, Atman would be identified with consciousness but not with its content or, alternatively, with the transcendent aspect of consciousness not exhausted by mental content of the sort we normally ascribe to persons. Thus Atman keeps both its purity (emptiness of content) and its content by incorporating both within itself. This interpretation, or something close to it, seems required by the general Vedantic thesis that Atman is one, undifferentiated, and manifest in varying degrees of clarity through every level of human consciousness.⁴ The consciousness involved in one's attending to his pain, for example, is not numerically other than pure consciousness identified with Brahman, although of course there are qualitative differences depending upon one's stage of spiritual realization; the attached hypochondriac, for instance, dwells excessively on his pain, whereas the sage is largely indifferent to personal pain.

II

The thesis of intentionality, that to be conscious is to be conscious *of* something, has become such an article of faith that to question it is an act of intellectual heresy. Its qualified denial, however, is what the Vedantic theory of consciousness entails. While admitting that intentionality is a defining characteristic of our normal waking consciousness and dream states, it is absent in states of dreamless sleep and in *turiya*, a fourth state in which the absolute identity of Brahman and Atman is realized—where consciousness persists without its objects.⁵ We shall focus upon the third state of dreamless sleep or what we normally depict as a state of unconsciousness, however. On the Vedantic view, what is "lost" in a state of dreamless sleep is not consciousness itself, but rather the objects of consciousness. One loses awareness *of* anything but does not become unaware.

Since the notion of an objectless consciousness is generally held to be an impossibility, our central purpose in this section will be to demonstrate its possibility. Moreover, I hope to show that this is not a mere possibility, but also that there are no better reasons for denying it than for affirming it.

From a logical point of view, the only way to guarantee the impossibility of an objectless consciousness is to identify consciousness with its objects. Such a move, however, would be self-defeating, since then we could not even formulate the thesis of intentionality. Moreover, the supposition that consciousness is (conceptually) identical with its objects is unintelligible.

Second, the thesis of intentionality would not appear to be logically true, since it is advanced as a phenomenological description, as a fundamental thesis about experience. If it is not logically true, then its denial is not self-contradictory. From this it follows that an objectless consciousness is a logical possibility. However, the Vedantist could agree that it is an analytic consequence of someone's being conscious that he is aware of some object, and respond by pointing out that this is true only of waking and dreaming states, since it is formulated within and with respect to those states. It does not entail the impossibility of an objectless consciousness in a state of dreamless sleep, any more than an analytic truth in one language necessarily corresponds to a counterpart in another language.

From a phenomenological point of view the possibility of an objectless consciousness cannot be ruled out, since 'Jones was aware of (literally) nothing' and 'Jones was unaware' (lacked awareness) describe identical states of Jones *for Jones* during his dreamless sleep. Moreover, from the fact that all persons who *are* awake are conscious of something, it does not follow that consciousness in certain states *cannot* be objectless. Finally, from the fact that we cannot "come across" an objectless consciousness it does not follow that it might not be objectless in certain contexts. For to make such a "discovery" would be to make consciousness its own object, and this cannot be as we shall see in section V. To insist that an objectless consciousness be given in experience in order to countenance the notion would thus beg the issue.

It would appear, then, that logical or phenomenological arguments which might be urged against the possibility of an objectless consciousness and provide some rational basis for an unrestricted thesis of intentionality either beg the issue against that possibility or turn on assumptions which can be rendered equally consistent with the possibility of an objectless consciousness. For example, since no person could directly *experience* the "losing" of consciousness, sentences such as 'I lost consciousness around 10:30 A.M.' can only be epistemologically grounded in an *inference* involving my memory of having been aware of no-thing after 10:30 A.M. (even though, of course, we do not make such inferences consciously).⁸ Such sentences are equally consistent with having lost consciousness and its objects or just the objects themselves. To insist that, after all, if one has lost consciousness of any objects one has automatically lost consciousness itself, is simply to beg

the issue in favor of the thesis of intentionality. In sum, there appear to be no better (nonquestion-begging) reasons for denying the persistence of consciousness during dreamless sleep than for affirming it. An occasional objectless consciousness is therefore more than a bare logical possibility.

III

A crucial issue raised by arguments of the preceding section is whether consciousness is fundamentally a relation between a subject and an object. For example, if consciousness is a relation and relations cannot exist without their terms, then an objectless consciousness is not a logical possibility. On the other hand, if as I have argued an objectless consciousness is a logical possibility, then consciousness is not a relation. To avoid the spectre of mutual question-begging, independent arguments should be forthcoming. Accordingly, I shall provide several additional arguments for the thesis that consciousness is not a relation, a thesis also required by the doctrine of Atman.

To begin, it is worth emphasizing that we seldom, if ever, treat consciousness as if it were a relation. For example, we speak of consciousness on the one hand and the objects or contents of consciousness on the other. We speak of it as existing in its own right, as a term, which stands in relations of intentionality to various objects. In a broader context, we speak of consciousness as a state in which certain persons may or may not be, just as we speak of pain as a state which some persons suffer. And pain is certainly not a relation.

Second, it is sometimes argued that consciousness must be a relation on the grounds that there can be no awareness without a subject who is aware of something. However, the persuasiveness of this argument depends upon the false assumption that a critic of the relational view must argue that there can be awareness of something without its being awareness by a certain subject. The alternative for the critic is to point out that the conclusion is too strong for the premise. That is, (S₁) 'Awareness of something entails awareness by a subject' is consistent with (S₂) 'Consciousness *stands* in a relation to a subject and his object'. (S₂), however, is inconsistent with (S₃) 'Consciousness *is* a relation between a subject and an object'. Therefore, (S₁) does not entail (S₃), and support for the relational view is accordingly lessened.

Third, the relational view gains some currency when the objects are other than oneself. It is at least suggested by sentences such as 'I am aware of the scratch on the desk'. However, if consciousness were an actual relation between a subject and an object, then *self-awareness* would be impossible. For to be self-aware is to make an object of oneself, and the only actual rela-

tion in which one stands to oneself is that of numerical identity. Yet, if consciousness is a relation between two particulars, a subject and an object, then the subject who is aware of himself must be distinct from the object of which there is awareness. It seems wise, however, to avoid the excessive ontology of a transcendental self or ego implied by this consequence. From the preceding, it follows that either consciousness is not a relation or self-awareness is impossible. But self-awareness is possible, therefore, consciousness is not a relation.

Finally, consciousness is not a relation, since it is logically prior to the subject which it allegedly relates to an object. It is logically prior because self-consciousness, which is presupposed by one's knowing that he as subject stands in a certain relation to an object, itself presupposes being conscious whereas being conscious does not entail being self-conscious, although as a contingent fact conscious beings are occasionally self-conscious. Stated differently, the very distinction between subjects and their objects, between me and my world, is one that arises *in* consciousness.⁹ Or again, myself, my relations to the world, and the objects of my world are all actual or possible data *for* consciousness. In summary, if the preceding observations are correct, they entail that consciousness is, as Sartre and others have argued, *prepersonal*. And if consciousness is prepersonal, then it is not a relation between persons and their objects.

IV

In *Individuals* Strawson argues that the defining feature of a set of experiences is that they are the experiences *of* some person.¹⁰ Now although it may be true that if consciousness is owned at all, it is owned necessarily, i.e., logically belongs to some person or other, we need not think of it as being possessed in the first place. Rather, we may conceive of consciousness along the lines suggested above and as required by the Vedantic view of Atman as prepersonal. If so, then what is true of a "set of experiences" will not be true of consciousness *per se*. To establish this logical difference, it will be necessary to show how the function of 'my' in 'my thoughts (sensations, feelings, etc.)' is not shared by the 'my' in 'my consciousness'. Indeed, we shall see that 'my consciousness' does not even have a standard use with which to compare 'my pain'.

The logical wedge I wish to insert is this. The psychological expressions 'my pain', 'my depression', 'my thoughts', etc., each admit of informative predication upon which the significance of 'my' is logically dependent. For example, 'My pain is severe'. The significance of 'my' is that it individuates

the possessor of the severe pain. It completes the phrase '... pain is severe'. 'My consciousness' on the other hand does not admit of any informative predication capable of sustaining the significant inclusion of 'my'. How might we complete 'My consciousness is ...'? The addition of 'non-spatial', for example, says nothing about *my* consciousness in particular, since everyone's consciousness shares this property. The inclusion of 'my' adds nothing to 'Consciousness is non-spatial'.

Three counterexamples potentially undermine this analysis. First, one might urge equally that 'My body has dimension' adds nothing to the concept of my body in particular. In response, however, it must be pointed out that my body admits of many other types of properties, e.g., color, height, etc., which give a point to the question 'Whose body is sunburned?'

A second counterexample is illustrated by 'My consciousness is fading' or similar assertions implying degrees of consciousness. Surely something informative about my consciousness in particular is being expressed here. The problem, however, is that such assertions are not about consciousness or awareness *per se*. Rather, they are, or may plausibly be construed as circumlocutions for, the facts expressed by, say, 'My thoughts are becoming hazy' or 'I am increasingly unable to differentiate the furniture in my room.' Indeed, the latter sentences are the only way to explicate the meaning of "fading consciousness". Moreover, it is contradictory to suppose that one might be introspectively aware of fading awareness itself, i.e., of something other than the furniture, thoughts, sounds, etc., of which I am aware. Fading is with respect to the *objects* of consciousness, not to consciousness *per se*.

A third counterexample is suggested by the question 'Whose consciousness is focused upon x?' for which an appropriate answer would be 'Mine is' or 'Smith's is'. While such a question is a bit queer-sounding, it is perfectly intelligible. Its critical thrust, however, can be avoided; it does not logically commit us to thinking of consciousness as belonging to a certain person. For it can be rephrased as 'For whom is x an object (of awareness)?' or more simply as 'Who is aware of x?' And these translations leave it an open question whether the awareness invoked is someone's in particular or is conceivably a universal consciousness, numerically the same consciousness involved in 'Smith is conscious', 'Jones is conscious', etc. For what is expressly individuated in these sentences are persons, not individual consciousnesses.

The topic of individuating consciousness is transitional between the beliefs that consciousness is necessarily owned and that it is necessarily plural. If, as I have argued, it is not necessarily owned, then it is not necessarily plural. And if we are not logically committed to pluralism in this respect, then the hypothesis of universal consciousness is a logical possibility.

Coming from the other direction, however, if the latter hypothesis involved any logical absurdities, then we should commit ourselves to pluralism, hence to the belief that consciousness is owned. Since ostensible cases of individuating consciousness support pluralism, then what needs to be shown in more detail is how these cases may be interpreted so as to leave a universal consciousness hypothesis logically intact. A failure to do so would obviously support pluralism and thereby undermine my claim in this section that we need not logically think of consciousness as being owned at all.

V

The central thesis of Advaita Vedanta is that Atman is in reality numerically identical with Brahman, the Universal Consciousness. Atman *is* Brahman as conceived from the subjective perspective of the individual person. Thus we are given to believe that the consciousness involved in 'Jones is enjoying the sunset' and 'Smith is in pain' is at bottom numerically the same. While this thesis does not admit of rational proof, we shall see that the principal objections to it are not sound and in most cases can be interpreted so as to be consistent with it.

First, do not the use of widely discussed psychophysical criteria of personal identity, e.g., memories, physical appearance, location in space, etc., entail a commitment to many consciousnesses, rather than to one universal consciousness? If we *begin* with the pluralistic assumption, then such criteria must indeed provide the key to tying each person's consciousness uniquely to himself—to insuring that Jones' consciousness is not Smith's. However, such criteria do not commit us to pluralism in the first place. Why not? Because, as we have seen earlier, consciousness is neither logically nor contingently identical with its contents or objects, and criteria of personal identity systematically are formulated in terms of some type of psychological or physical content.

Consider the case of a particular type of physical content, the states and processes of a brain. Now, if consciousness were a brain process, then many brains would entail many consciousnesses. But consciousness is neither logically nor, it would seem, contingently identical with brain processes. With respect to meaning, for example, consciousness is not the kind of entity which admits of predicates of spatial location whereas brain processes do. Moreover, if consciousness were contingently identical with, say, the firing of neurons in circuits A, B, and C, then we could not account for the polar structure of the subject's own awareness of the firings in those circuits as imaginable with an appropriate arrangement of mirrors and medical instrumen-

tation. An account of such simultaneous awareness would commit us to a regress of firings, and so on. (A similar argument was advanced in section I with respect to psychological content. However, such arguments in themselves do not entail dualism; consciousness could be a type of energy not observable and localizable in the same way that brain processes are.) Therefore, many brains do not entail many consciousnesses.

If no descriptive features of persons of either a psychological or physical variety logically commit us to pluralism, then Ockham's razor suggests the collapse of many consciousnesses into a universal consciousness. The pluralistic alternative is superfluous if whatever functions or relations ascribed to an individual consciousness can be ascribed to a universal consciousness. For example, we may say that one's consciousness stands in a special, direct relation of exemplification to its contents such that the latter partially exemplify the nature of the former. Exactly how this relation should be conceived presents problems we cannot take up here. But however this relation may be conceived, it may be transposed intact into a universal consciousness hypothesis (UCH). A universal consciousness, for example, may simultaneously stand in many direct relations of exemplification to the psychological states of as many persons as are currently in those states.

Second, the UCH appears consistent with introspective testimony. That is, introspection can be shown not to support pluralism more than monism in this respect. For what is given in introspection are data or objects *for* consciousness, viz., thoughts, emotions, sensations, etc., not a numerically distinct consciousness. If consciousness cannot be its own object, then it cannot be given as one among several of my mental objects; it is not given in the singular, as an individual, nor for that matter, as a universal entity. The antecedent of this claim, however, requires further clarification and defense.

Can consciousness be its own object? On the one hand such a possibility seems unintelligible. What would it be like to discriminate consciousness, to place it within the flux of one's experience in the way, say, that one might compare the severity of this morning's pain with this afternoon's pain? On the other hand, if consciousness can be its own object or datum, and if to be an object is to be an object *for* consciousness, then such a possibility encounters the need for an infinite series of consciousnesses, the function of each of which would be to be conscious of another "lower order" consciousness. Of course, there may be awareness of internal or external activity, such as deliberate motion, which we designate as "conscious" activity; one can obviously be aware of the fact that one is aware. But this does not make a datum of consciousness any more than the eye's reflection in a mirror is an instance of actually looking at itself. In self-knowledge consciousness is never given as one among many objects.

A rebuttal to this argument is presented by Sartre.¹¹ He points out that there is consciousness of consciousness in the very act of its positional focus on objects other than itself. If we wish to avoid an infinite regress of consciousnesses, he argues, then we *must* posit an immediate, "non-positional" relation of consciousness to itself. However, we may grant Sartre's claim with the rejoinder that it is only positional consciousness of (mental) objects that is at stake. In Sartrean terms, my argument depends only upon the fact that there cannot be positional consciousness of consciousness—which Sartre would grant. The claim that consciousness cannot be its own object remains intact.

In summary, just as (with the early Wittgenstein) nothing *in* my visual field allows me to infer that its objects are seen with my eye(s), nothing *in* my experience permits me to logically infer that its contents are objects for my consciousness, rather than for a universal consciousness. The transcendental character of consciousness, whether depicted as the spaceless, timeless Atman of Vedanta or as the nothingness of Sartre, escapes particularization.

Third, the UCH is compatible with the commonsense belief that there are distinct persons, since consciousness itself is not a subject of experience; it is not the kind of thing which has physical or psychological states. Persons can be hot or depressed, whereas consciousness cannot. Therefore, if consciousness is not an individual subject of experience, it could not be a universal subject—a kind of "super I"—which thinks our thoughts. Thus the UCH avoids the logical thrust of Strawson's objection to the possibility of a "group-mind hypothesis."¹² He reasons that one cannot even formulate coherently such a hypothesis without tacitly assuming his by now widely examined concept of a person as a logically primitive subject to which both M and P predicates are ascribed. While this may be correct, his objection is directed against a group mind which thinks our thoughts and performs our actions along the lines suggested by corporate activity. And in this respect the UCH and group-mind hypothesis are quite dissimilar. On the UCH, then, we give up neither our numerical distinctness as subjects of experience nor our individual identities. Nor, it should be added, since our actions are not performed for us, do we abandon a basis for individual moral responsibility.

Fourth, the UCH is compatible with the belief that each of us has direct, non-observational (private) knowledge of our current mental states. In sentences such as 'Smith is now aware of his pain' it is perhaps natural, though not necessary, to think of the subject as momentarily focusing "his" awareness upon his sensation. It is not necessary because we can translate the above sentence, *salva veritas*, to the more neutral 'There is now direct, non-observational awareness of Smith's pain,' which preserves the truth value of the former by preserving uniqueness of reference. It preserves uniqueness of

reference, since no person other than Smith can have such awareness of Smith's pain. Jones, the traditional distinction correctly requires, has indirect or observational knowledge of Smith's pain. The substitution of 'There is . . . ' in the preceding translation leaves it an open question whether the awareness involved is Jones' or a manifestation of a universal consciousness. If we accept the translation, then we are not logically committed to the pluralistic alternative to the UCH, and the UCH is compatible with the fact of privacy.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the UCH is perfectly compatible with each of us "owning," even in a logically non-transferable way (to borrow Strawson's expression), our current experiences. A condition of knowing a pain to be *my* pain, for example, is that I have direct, non-observational knowledge of that pain.¹³ Knowing it to be instantiated in the way I do, viz., privately is tantamount to knowing it as mine. Since the UCH is compatible with privacy, it is compatible with the belief that a certain pain is uniquely mine. Stated differently, my pain would not be mine were a universal consciousness a universal subject or "I." For then there would be no distinct possessors to own pains. However, since the UCH is not to be so construed, it cannot be ruled out on the grounds that what I believe to be my experiences are not, after all, mine.

Is the UCH or doctrine of Brahman-Atman consistent with the concept of a *subject* of experience, as many Western philosophers have doubted? The answer depends upon how this concept is interpreted. If subjects of experience are empirical persons, then we may respond with a provisional "yes." In the course of our examination there has arisen a rather sharp distinction between a prepersonal, transcendent, and possibly universal consciousness on the one hand and the concrete individual denoted by 'I' to which we ascribe psychological and physical states and properties on the other. If the arguments of the preceding section are correct, then the only entity not uniquely possessed by each person is consciousness itself, although the contents of consciousness are.

If, however, subjects of experience are immaterial selves, as Neo-Kantians and Cartesians argue,¹⁴ then an incompatibility is evident, for the doctrine of Brahman-Atman entails that such selves are ultimately illusory. We cannot, of course, debate here conflicting Western views of the self in order to determine whether a possible compatibility exists between the UCH and/or doctrine of Brahman-Atman and the concept of a subject of experience. As an alternative, however, I should like to sketch the bare outlines of the *kind* of theory of subjecthood which reflects certain concerns of both of the above traditions, and is minimally consistent with the Vedantic view of Brahman-Atman.

Briefly, the concept of a subject of experience should be metaphysically grounded in a *relation* between consciousness and the empirical person one happens to be, e.g., Woodhouse, the individual now writing an article on consciousness. The concept would be reducible to neither term in the relation nor to the relation itself. Rather, it would borrow from the non-spatial elusiveness of consciousness on the one hand and the individuality achieved by one's location in space on the other. Each person on this view would stand in a special *direct* relation to consciousness for which he is an object in acts of self-awareness and in an *indirect* relation to the same universal consciousness for which he may be an object from the perspective of another person. A person stands in a direct relation to consciousness here insofar as he is an object through which consciousness is expressed or manifest.

Our alternative theory requires that the duality of 'my pain' is fundamentally not that between a possessor with a residual ontological status and the pain possessed, but between consciousness and its intended-content. This is evidenced by the fact that, as noted earlier, 'I am aware of my pain' can be rendered *salva veritas* as 'There is now direct awareness of P's pain' where P is the empirical person referred to by the appropriate proper-name, descriptions, etc., and the speaker is P. The self is the empirical person (object) insofar as it is an individual thing denoted by 'I'. However, the possibility of conceiving of myself as just this self (person), Woodhouse, is grounded in the direct relation in which this person stands to a universal and transcendent consciousness outside himself as it were.

To assert the preceding, of course, does not make it so. However, since I have defended the theory elsewhere in detail,¹⁵ an extensive development here is not in order. My intent is merely to sketch the outlines of a view which, if it is the case, may provide a fruitful intersection of exchange between Eastern and Western philosophers of mind.¹⁶

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NOTES

1. Idealistic worldviews, particularly those of Fichte, Schopenhauer, and Bradley, are in *some* respects compatible with Vedantic metaphysics. However, their monistic outlooks are logically and epistemologically tied to the principle of internal relations, whereas my proposals are not. Of recent Western philosophers my views are closest to those of W.T. Stace as developed in his *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Lipincott and Company, 1960).